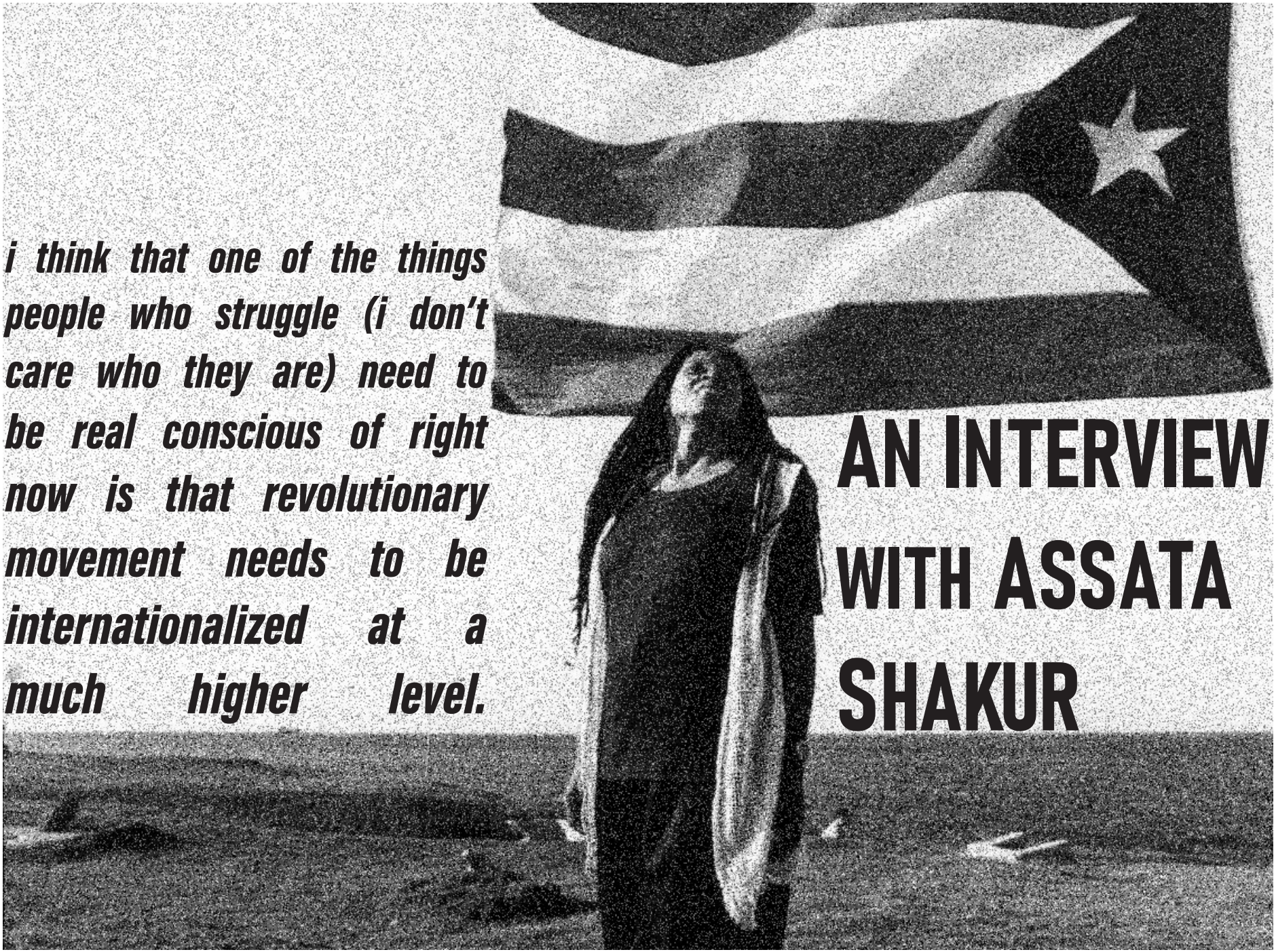

i think that one of the things people who struggle (i don't care who they are) need to be real conscious of right now is that revolutionary movement needs to be internationalized at a much higher level.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ASSATA SHAKUR

So it is key to not deal with the specifics of the cases, but to demand amnesty for all political prisoners, period. And also to realize, as political activists, if i do not struggle to liberate those who have been in prison for so long, then i am creating a situation where the government feels freer and freer to come after me.

If We do not struggle to liberate those political prisoners who have been in prison since the '60s, since the beginning of 1970, then what are We saying to our youth? Are We saying, "Alright, you struggle, if the f.b.i. frames you, well, it's your problem. We're not going to defend you, We're not going to fight for your liberation. We accept the propaganda. We accept the right of the poor to be used as a repressive instrument, We accept that. We accept the position of the government; We accept the accusations of the government." Is that what Our movement is truly about? Whose definitions are We willing to accept?

And, the facts in the particular cases, say in the case of Geronimo Pratt, the New York 3, the Queens Two, i mean, the facts are overwhelming. The government actively conspired, is actively conspiring, to imprison activists. So, i mean, it's a question of unbrainwashing ourselves, and unracisizing ourselves. Because part of the reason, i think, so many Afrikans and Third World people have been in prison so many years is also due to racism on the left. If white people want to know what they can do in terms of struggling, one of the things they can do is struggle on a much more intense level to liberate political prisoners.

Interview conducted by Meg Starr and Matt Meyer, 1991

Originally published in *Crossroad: A New Afrikan Captured Combatant Newsletter*, Spring, Summer, and Fall 1992

know how many, political prisoners—some of whom have been in prison for more than 20 years—and you have a left that claims to be opposed to government repression, but has not done the job it should have been doing to free political prisoners.

You have the case of Dhoruba Bin-Wahad who, after 19 years in prison, the government finally admitted that they played with the evidence, witheld evidence that would have served to free him and proved his innocence. And after 19 years, the government said, "yeah, well, you know..." Can We deal with a reality where those who are victimized by the government are going to have to go to the government files to prove that the government victimized them? And when that same government, through the Freedom of Information Act, sends blank pages, half or three-quarters of all of the pages blank, now how can you prove—how can political prisoners be forced to prove their innocence? How can they prove that their acts are political acts made in the valid struggle for Self-Determination and the liberation of their people?

i think that the only way We can principally deal with the question of political prisoners and prisoners of war in the united states is to demand amnesty for all political prisoners and struggle around that. It's important to work in defense committees, but as a movement, We have got to make decisions. We have to agree on certain basic things: (a) that oppressed people have the right to struggle for their liberation, to struggle to end their oppression, and they need to be supported—whether We agree with their particular line, organization, whatever; and (b) that it is in fact true that the united states government frames people, sends them to prison, kills people, etc., and We have to be conscious that anybody who poses a threat, imagined or real, is subject to that kind of repression.

At one time labeled "the Most Dangerous Woman in America," Assata Shakur is an uncompromising, broad-minded revolutionary, critical thinker and a clear representation of modern-day resistance. Assata was one of the primary targets of the f.b.i.'s counter-insurgency operation, COINTELPRO. On May 2, 1973, Assata, Sundiata Acoli, and Zayd Malik Shakur were attacked by state troopers on the new jersey turnpike. The ambush led to the murder of Zayd and the severe wounding and capture of Assata. Though Sundiata was able to escape capture at the time, he was later arrested and is currently one of Our longest-held combatants.

After spending six years in prison, Assata was liberated by New Afrikan and Anti-Imperialist forces in 1979. She received political asylum from the Cuban government and resides there today. A memorable shero of revolutionary struggle, Assata documented the horrendous episode of her "encounter" with the u.s. government, experiences with the Black Panther Party and "coming of age" in amerikkka in her book Assata: An Autobiography *(Lawrence Hill Books).*

Having survived COINTELPRO, Assata remains grounded in liberatory principles. As a warrior, teacher, and thinker, Assata brings over 20 years of experience to struggle. Her revolutionary outlook and analysis should be heard, discussed, and critiqued.

Meg Starr: You mentioned you were working on a book, could you tell me something about it?

Assata Shakur: The book is essentially about the ideological development of the Black Liberation Movement, the relationship between the Black Liberation Movement in the united states and world revolutionary movements. It deals, in some parts, with changes in eastern europe—in passing. It also explores some ideas i am currently dealing with in terms of things i think are important for Afrikans living in the united states to think about. These are just some ideas i want to fill out. i am trying to write the book in a way that does not say, "These are the answers; this is the answer." i'm trying to just deal with: This is what i'm thinking at the moment. Hopefully, that will grow. But, these are some things to throw out for people to reflect on and to give me some feedback on. i'm trying to write in a non-arrogant, non-absolutist way, and i think that's important right now for people interested in making ideological input; to develop a style of writing and a style of work that is contra-arrogant. i think arrogance is one of the things that has really stifled the world revolutionary movement and really hindered communication between people.

M.S.: As you're doing that, I'm sure you are thinking a lot about the '60s and '70s. Do you have any things that you feel were particular lessons? And I know you don't want to put this in dogmatic terms, but any particular lessons from the '60s and '70s that you've been thinking about?

Assata: Well, i think all of us have learned many, many lessons from the '60s and '70s. Those years for me were my political education, my political period of growth and development—the

and prisoners of war held in the united states? What do you think the Left should be doing about their cases right now?

Assata: What do i think about...?

M.M.: The first tribunal, the first tribunal...

Assata: i think it's a damn shame, that's what i think about it!

i think it's horrendous. The fundamental reason there are so many political prisoners in the united states is because the united states government's policy is to destroy anybody who poses a threat to the policies of its government. There's a secondary reason why those political prisoners are still in prison, why so many political prisoners are still in prison. There are a lot of people in the united states who are brainwashed; there are a lot of people on the left who are brainwashed and who claim to understand that COINTELPRO was real and that COINTELPRO under another name, whatever they call it now, is still real. Even though people claim that they understand the history of the united states, that they understand McCarthyism, the problem of AIDS, the repressive role of the f.b.i., the police agencies, etc., there still seems to be a kind of mind warp in terms of supporting and freeing political prisoners. Because a lot of people, even though they claim to understand all that, they claim to see all that, but they are not actively supporting political prisoners.

There's this kind of double psychology, "they must have done something." i think it has to do with the way that many of us are not conscious to the extent that the media shapes and forms the way We conceive of a given event. So you have 100, and i don't

be seen whose ends those changes are going to serve. Right now, it looks like the workers are the people who are going to suffer the most. i think it's a shame that the conditions of Stalinism and the kind of model that was constructed by Stalin were so negative that many people are manipulated by it today.

But there is a lesson to be learned for anybody in what looks like a huge, great power; in that that huge, great power can be broken down to obtain Self-Determination—not by one people, but by many people who are struggling within that structure to gain Self-Determination. It would be very difficult for Us to determine Our destiny without bringing the united states down, without a true revolution—and it doesn't have to be a violent revolution, it just has to be a change; a total change by a variety of people because revolutionary change now can happen in any way. There's no formula for it, and the reality is Our politics have to say that We don't like violence. Anybody whose politics say, "I love violence, I like to kill"—i mean, that's a crazy person. Our politics have to be, i hate violence, i don't want to deal with it. If i am forced to deal with it, if there's no other way around it, i will be violent against those who are violent against me. But clearly, the question of armed struggle, the question of, can it be an isolated thing, there cannot be any such thing as a narrow arrow type of struggle that is just armed struggle. In every political process, there must be struggle on all fronts—whether it's in the electoral arena, on a community grassroots level, in a union level, political parties...whatever. There must be coordinated political struggle on all levels involving different groups of people: students, workers, farmers, what have you. You have to deal with all kinds of elements of society that are experiencing oppression. And that's a lesson that just has to be learned.

M.S.: What do you think about the over 100 political prisoners

beginning of my political growth and development. i think that one of the things that i learned, or think i learned, is that it's not important so much who directs, who is in the vanguard, it's that people work together wherever they are—whether they're in a union; whether they're in a block committee, whether they're working in a political organization; whatever place they are: to do work; to become active; to become aware; to increase the level of activity rather than to concentrate on being the vanguard, on trying to lead a movement. A lot of times people who were trying to lead didn't know where they were going.

Leadership has to be, in the new sense of leadership, a collective process, and the concept of vanguard has to be collectivized, has to be put in the context of the 1990s and approaching 2000, because people come from many different concepts of freedom. The point is for us to sit down and make some kind of agreement on some basic things and understand that what is going to be freedom to me, is not necessarily going to be freedom for you. Self-Determination must be a very important part of what We're talking about when We talk about political organization—political activity—that has to be underlined, because everybody doesn't have the same dream. So, there has to be room for everybody to attempt to move toward that dream, as long as that dream does not include oppressing other people, exploiting other people.

M.S.: When I was young, my political development was being shaped by the Black Movement in a lot of different ways. (I might now look back on it and say in my consciousness-raising group as a woman, all these terms like stereotype were being used, things that we were getting from the Black Movement, but not knowing we were getting them from the Black Movement.) One of the terms that's come up from the '60s and '70s, in talking about the leadership of the Black Movement, within the movements in the

united states, that it had a role in radicalizing lots of other parts of the movement. I wonder how you see that—the leading role of the Black Movement?

Assata: Well, i think it's logical, and i also think it's correct that the people that are most oppressed, in any given country, should have a great deal to say about the direction that a movement must take, should take, etc. Logically, the most oppressed people should have a great deal of influence in what happens. If that doesn't happen, then what you have is a very elitist, racist movement.

So, if the Black Liberation Movement, the Movement for Puerto Rican Independence, the movement of oppressed people in general, the movement for the liberation of the Indigenous people, if these movements are not in first focus, are not up front in the movement as a whole, then something is wrong. i think that necessarily the "working class" movement has to deal with the most oppressed workers, workers who are dealing with an oppression that is much greater. Those workers must be heard. Those workers must have some kind of role in leadership of the movement as a whole. Because without that you have a distortion, you have something that does not reflect the reality. It just disintegrates into something that is arrogant, racist, and eurocentric. i think that for too many years the ideological input into the movement has been eurocentric. The ideas and the revolutionary examples of Third World people have been ignored, minimalized, minimized. The contributions of so many revolutionary people have just been overlooked by the european movement, by the white left in the united states. This has not been studied with any seriousness; that trend must be changed. i think that for a revolutionary ideology to evolve, that is truly scientific in nature, it must come from the experience not of europe, but from all of the world; the experience of Afrikans, the

yourself and (b) you must struggle under these terms and the terms we dictate. If you go outside of these terms—that framework—then you're crazy, you're terrorists."

So it was important, in terms of the 1960s and '70s, to say (a) We have the right to self-defense, and (b) that We have the right, as Malcolm X said, to struggle "by any means necessary." Those were key ideas that We had to struggle around during that period. And in the course of that struggle, there was an emphasis on armed struggle; an emphasis on self-defense that may have, in some instances, minimized other aspects of the struggle. But that was a necessary time, it was a necessary experience, and it was necessary for Afrikan people to realize that We, as a people, are going to have to free Ourselves. That's a reality. That's an objective reality.

Hopefully We will not have to do it alone. It does not make sense for Us to try to do it alone. For example, the experiences of the Soviet Union clearly shows what happens when different people work together to bring a huge country to a halt. Within that process, there were different people with different goals, different ideas of what Self-Determination is, but only by bringing the monster down is Self-Determination possible.

Now, i'm not equating bringing down the united states monster with the bringing down of the Soviet Union. One is/would be a revolutionary process, as in the context of the united states. In the context of the Soviet Union, i don't know what the hell that is. i mean, there were people who sincerely wanted to reform socialism, who wanted to make it better, more human. There were other people who wanted to destroy it. Within the whole process of Glasnost and Perestroika, you have people who were interested in making socialism better, others who were purely interested in personal power. That's my analysis. And it remains to

with the Tupamaros, wherever, the revolutionaries were dealing with the idea of urban guerrilla warfare and rural guerrilla warfare. In most cases, there was an emphasis on armed struggle and not on other aspects of the struggle. In most of those cases, there was a failure of people on the left to unify. In the majority of those cases, those movements were destroyed and defeated. i think the reason for the defeat was (a) a lack of unity on the left and (b) many of those movements failed to analyze the objective conditions in their specific countries.

In relation to the united states, obviously revolutionaries in the '60s and early '70s were very much affected by what was going on in Afrika, Asia, and Vietnam; those were very inspiring revolutionary struggles that We were all affected by. In some instances, We tried to apply the experiences of other people mechanically to Our struggle. In the specific case of the Black Liberation Movement in the united states, the question of armed struggle had a very specific and a very important significance. The question of armed struggle took on added significance because all during the civil rights movement—because of direct action and non-violence—many people interpreted "non-violence" as the only framework Afrikans in the united states could struggle in, morally, realistically, etc. Instead of being dealt with as a tactic, direct action and non-violence were dealt with as an ideology. There was a need to combat on different levels: on the level that Afrikans in the united states have the right to self-defense and that that right was an absolute; whether We defended ourselves or not, in a given situation, depended on what We decided—what Our tactics were, what Our strategy was. That was important for Us to deal with as a people.

So, the question of armed struggle within Our movement was even more important because there was a whole national media that was saying "look, you don't have any right to (a) defend

experiences of Asians, Latin Amerikans, and of europeans. But it must reflect a body of knowledge that comes from the whole world and a theory of history that is based on the experiences of the whole world, not just europe. That is one of the errors that must be corrected at this time.

The bankrupt kind of ideology, the kind of stagnation that has been coming out of the european experience, for the last years, shows that something else must be developed. The most oppressed people in the world right now are Afrikans, Asians, and Latin Amerikans. So, the ideological input of Afrikans, Asians, and Latin Amerikans is not only important, it is essential. It's necessary because imperialism has reached such a state it's really difficult to separate racism from imperialism; eurocentrism from imperialism, because they're connected. Perpetuating an ideology that is eurocentric is also perpetuating an ideological imperialism.

So, in order to destroy imperialism, there must be an ideological movement from the people who are victimized by imperialism. This is not to say that other experiences are not important and not to say the contributions of european revolutionaries—Marx, Engels, Lenin—are not valid, not important. You don't throw them out. But that must be expanded.

A science, to be a science, cannot be stagnant; it has to grow. If it does not grow, then it becomes a dogma. A science must be something that is constantly expanding, constantly growing, and one of the problems has been that there has been no systematic way in which socialist theory could grow because the dogmatism has just dominated—for years—the ideological and, in many ways, practical aspects of the left. That has to be rethought, and those tendencies have to be thrown out the window, because they don't help and they've done a lot to hinder people's freedom.

Matt Meyer: I guess from that, we were wondering if you could speak generally about what you think the role now of north amerikans or european-amerikans are within the revolutionary process—what can european-amerikans do to be a positive part of the process?

Assata: Well, i think that one thing that needs to be done is education. People really need to educate themselves and to educate other people to communicate with others; to make use of the tremendous amount of technology that is in the hands of white north amerikans. People have access to computers, have access to videos, have access to all kinds of technology that needs to be exploited. i mean the ideas that some revolutionary people have had to organize people has been prehistoric reality. Somebody has an idea that to organize people is with a leaflet. You go up to somebody and hand them a leaflet and the leaflet says "Workers of the World Unite." This is 1991, going into 1992. You have so many more things at your disposal now.

What needs to be done is to use those things to organize in a creative way; to organize other white people, other people, in some cases Black people. But, i think the principal task of white revolutionaries is to organize white people and to struggle against racism—not only in terms of institutional forms—but in terms of struggling against one's own racism. i think it is dishonest to say that white people living in a racist society, receiving racist education with racist teachers and often with racist parents, reading racist books, looking at racist television, etc., etc., are not affected by racism. Everybody living in a racist society is affected by racism. White people have to deal with racism on two planes. One: on a political level, and two: on a personal level. And that's a lifelong battle for one who's seriously interested in struggling against racism.

other people mechanically. We really have to analyze what damage has been done and make a sincere effort not to repeat those same kind of mistakes.

M.M.: Speaking of future work, you've spoken on the role of guns as almost the least important piece of struggle. Can you share your reflections on this?

Assata: The 1960s were very important in terms of the world liberation movement; in Afrika; in Asia, and in Latin Amerika, there were many processes and people struggling for political independence. They were struggling against colonialism and imperialism. Many of those processes had elements of armed struggle. But in many cases, people romanticized the aspect of armed struggle without understanding that at the same time Vietnam was involved in armed struggle, there was also political struggle, diplomatic struggle, a struggle of the unions...i mean, there was a whole process of struggle that was going on.

Many people conceived of the Cuban revolution, for example, as Fidel, Che, and Raoul going to the mountains. But they did not understand that there was a whole political struggle that had been going on, that continued to go on, all the way back from before Cuba received its "independence." The July 26 movement was a political movement that was waged on campuses, had links with the unions and other leftist movements, and was able to forge unity—a political unity. It wasn't just a simplistic matter of going off into the mountains.

In the 1960s, the whole idea of armed struggle was a romantic one, was prevalent because of the objective conditions during that time. In many countries, whether it was in Brazil, or Uruguay

But i think We've got to get away from the idea that one party is going to be the vanguard to lead us to some salvation. i mean, that does not fit with the reality of the 1990s. It might fit in some places—i don't want to absolutize or apply one experience to everybody. There may be places where one party might lead a people to liberation, but in the majority of situations, especially in multi-national places like the united states, that's very unrealistic. So, forming the leadership has to be thought of in collective terms. In order to do this, We have to develop the skills necessary to deal collectively. We have to develop the respect to deal collectively. We have to learn by doing. We're in an electronic age. We have to find new ways of organizing people, new ways of educating people—creative ways. It could be revolutionary folk operas, *[laughs]* i don't know. We have to find and deal with people where they are—not where We think they should be.

i think a lot of the young rap artists are setting a great example. i think they're more in touch with people and more actively involved in changing people's way of thinking than many of the so-called revolutionaries with long histories, who just talk to themselves. We have to deal with that fact.

It's okay to talk to yourself, and it's okay to talk among yourselves, but when you start doing that exclusively, then you start acting crazy. When all you do is talk to yourself, then you have got a problem. And many revolutionaries have got a problem. They are not only talking to each other—to themselves, but when they deal with people who have nothing to do with their movement, they talk at them. They don't listen to what the people are saying, they don't learn from them. So, it's a problem when you just talk to yourself and talk at people. That, you know, is a category of mental illness! i think that the movement has got to deal with being sane, being logical, being concrete and setting priorities—realistic priorities—not fantasizing, not trying to apply the experiences of

In the same way that Black people, who are affected by racism, have to struggle constantly with the feelings of inferiority, which are inflicted by the society on an overall basis—and that's a constant struggle. White people have to struggle against racism in its institutional forms and all of its forms. The struggle against racism and the struggle for a new society is one that is a lifelong process. It has to take many forms. It has many aspects.

Obviously most white people in the united states are not going to feel outraged by extreme poverty; some will, but the majority won't. Most will become involved in issues that are related to the environment, women, etc., etc., etc., so coming from there—whether it's the environment, whether it's women—and relating that to an international system of imperialism, understanding the underlying roots, and understanding that in order to struggle against any form of oppression, one has to go to the source. One must look at the whole system, and it's not just the united states. It's not just the military-industrial complex; it's a system of international imperialism that is causing the destruction of the environment, that is causing the oppression of women, that is causing so many ills, that is causing racism, that is causing people to starve in Afrika, that is causing people to be tortured in El Salvador. It is an international system that must be struggled against.

i think that one of the things people who struggle (i don't care who they are) need to be real conscious of right now is that revolutionary movement needs to be internationalized at a much higher level. People really need to do networking, to touch base, not just in their neighborhood, in their city, not just in their state or country, but at an international level.

People who are concerned about the environment need to deal on an international level. People who are struggling to liberate

political prisoners should organize on an international level, because this is the only way We're gonna win. What We're struggling against is an international system of imperialism, and those imperialists are organizing very effectively internationally. So, in order to struggle against that, and to be effective, We've got to make outreach; to not have an exclusionary type of mentality when it comes to approaching other people, but to have an inclusionary type of outreach. Come in, let's get together, what can We agree on, what can We work together on. That has got to go from being just a general idea to a skill that's a well-tooled, well-developed skill.

M.M.: You know, one of the things white folk who have been struggling against racism on both a political and personal level have confronted is contradictions or confusions about what real solidarity means. Solidarity, collaboration, oppressed movements, and then this whole concept about what intervention can mean for white folk with all that technology and all these material resources. Will you speak on the concepts of solidarity and intervention, define them and say what you think true avenues for that could be?

Assata: Okay, i think one of the fundamental things needed for solidarity is respect. The respect of other people's culture, other people's ideas, and respect for Self-Determination. Going back to the experience of eastern europe, on one hand you had Stalinists and the Stalinist model, and in some ways, some very real ways, the Soviet Union lent real help to Third World people who were struggling. In other ways they fell short of that. Many of the eastern european countries, with the exception of those having a [Communist Party] school (having some foreign students there), really showed no true internationalism in the sense of say,

Assata: Well, i don't think there were ever any recipes to follow. There was an idea and many people went around acting like they had the recipe, acting like socialism was something like red paint. You can just paint on anything and it will come out socialist. Each specific country, each specific situation, each specific people has its own specific needs, requirements, desires, aspirations, etc. that fit into a movement. That's the kind of dialectic between the national reality of people and the international reality of a world revolutionary movement—and the need to struggle against imperialism.

i really don't think there was ever a recipe. It's not like you took two cups of Marx and a cup of Engels, throw in three drops of Lenin, and you've got freedom forever. That's silly. The reality of struggle is that you have to think, invent, and create. You have to work and learn from experience what works and what doesn't, what makes sense and what doesn't. You have to learn to get along. i mean to get along in terms of progressive people working together—whether you agree on everything or not. You have to learn that it's not a luxury to form working unity, it's a necessity. People need to find ways of working around common issues that they share. That's an absolute necessity and simple logic.

It's like, if there were eight monsters attacking me and 20 people in the room. Now, if my attitude is that i'm just gonna fight against these monsters by myself and i'm not gonna try to deal with these 20 other people to help me fight these monsters, then i am not dealing with a sane and rational mind. Then, if i do deal with these 20 other people and i say, "you just do what i say, you listen to me," that is also irrational. Those 20 people might have some very good ideas about how we can deal with these monsters. Let's get together y'all, let's exchange ideas, let's deal with the monsters. As long as We keep the focus on the monsters, We'll be all right.

Right now, Cuba needs people, too; it needs all the solidarity that it can get. It needs people who have appreciated the revolution, who have appreciated the achievements of the revolution, to come out and actively organize on whatever level, to help the revolution to sustain itself, and to go on to a higher level and struggle within the united states to overturn the blockade. There was never any logical reason for the blockade, but even the pretenses are no longer valid. Not at all. No one can be duped at this point into saying that Cuba is a satellite of the Soviet Union. Nobody can be duped anymore into saying that Cuba is a strategic military launching point for the Soviet planes or whatever. If anybody might have been duped in the past, all of that is completely exposed and pure fiction. So there is no reason for the blockade to be maintained.

People in the united states have to point this out and struggle around the issue that Cuba has a right to Self-Determination. People who believe in Self-Determination (whether they believe in socialism or not), who believe that a country has the right to determine what kind of government it has and what kind of system it wants, have to struggle to lift the blockade. The blockade is there for one reason, and one reason only, to prevent Cuban people from determining their own destiny. i think that has to be a focus of the movement, the left or anybody else concerned about Self-Determination and a people's right to freedom, liberty, and justice for all.

M.M.: You've spoken about the need for a whole new work style on the Left; and that presently there are no recipes to follow. Given these two dynamics, what are your thoughts about future work in general: how do we go through the process of figuring out what to do—in that we need to re-haul and there are no recipes to follow?

a Cuba. Even though Cubans are generally a people who share what they have, Cuba is an underdeveloped country. The sense of imperialism in Cuba is much more highly developed than in any of the european countries. One of the fatal errors of that process was to consider solidarity as simply going to the U.N. and voting with the Soviet Union and not much more. It did not include personal sacrifices; it did not include a much more serious commitment to the liberation of Third World people. And so you have european workers who did not really feel a sense of solidarity with workers in the Third World, but felt a material kind of envy for workers in england, france, and the united states. Workers who shared those kinds of values, the "we want color TVs," and did not really perceive that the reason why the lifestyle of some workers, and i have to emphasize "some" workers, in the developed countries was at a higher level was because those countries were directly involved in sucking the blood of Third World workers—Third World people. Only a country that is involved in this kind of behavior can give some workers a higher standard of living. Solidarity in the sense of many european countries was lip service, was a few gestures, but was not a real gut self-sacrificing solidarity with Third World people. You find a situation now where you have people all throughout eastern europe volunteering to go live in South Afrika. You have a situation where europeans are attacking Third World people all over europe and eastern europe, too. Eastern europe, western europe, there is this wave of racism that didn't just come out of nowhere. It is there because there was no real struggle raised against it. There was no real ideological process that took place on any real, in-depth level. So, solidarity meant one thing very superficial. And in addition to that, there was chauvinism. A kind of "we have the answers and all y'all savages gotta listen to us, cause we got Marx and Engels and we know all the answers. And you can make a revolution just the way we think you should make it, and you can just repeat what we say. And if you say anything

different from what we say, you're a revisionist."

There's this kind of totally arrogant refusal to listen to anybody else, to learn from the experiences of anybody else, to appreciate the struggle or the culture of anybody else. And i'm not absolutizing because there was some effort in the socialist bloc to struggle against racist ideas, to struggle against eurocentricity, but it was not adequate in dealing with the reality of the Third World. And you had people, from Che Guevara to Nkrumah, who were completely ignored. i mean, nobody studied what Fidel was saying, and Fidel made critical remarks about what was happening in europe dating back to 1968 or before. But nobody listened. He was like, "our boy in Havana"—the revolutionary with the gun rather than anyone who had any ideological input into the world revolutionary movement. The same thing happened all over the world, whether it was with Ho Chi Minh or whoever. The ideological contributions were minimized. Therefore, the doubts and the problems raised in reference to the Third World were minimized. No real solutions, in terms of how do Third World countries free themselves, were looked at. *(Not just from the national bourgeoisie, but how do they develop? How do they free themselves from an international system of imperialism, which is much stronger than the national bourgeoisie?)* So it was just this kind of chauvinistic outlook that the white left all over the world has been historically guilty of, must take the weight for, and must try to rectify by studying, listening, and learning from Third World people.

They must recognize that logically, the most oppressed people must have a leadership role in any revolutionary process. i mean, that is logical, that is historically valid, and i think that is historically necessary. i don't know if i answered your question.

M.M.: You did. Intervention?

Assata: Well, at the present time, there are virtually very few socialist countries left. As you know, most of Cuba's trade was with the Soviet Union and with the eastern european countries. In terms of Cuba, the changes economically have meant the majority of the eastern european countries have not honored any, or most, of the contract agreements and economic treaties that they had with Cuba. So the goods that Cuba was expecting, were planning on, never arrived, haven't arrived, etc. In terms of the Soviet Union, some goods have arrived, but the number is around 30 percent of what was promised, what was agreed on. In different instances, 30 percent, or less, has arrived. The Soviet Union (what *was* the Soviet Union—now We're dealing with the Commonwealth of whatever) is so unstable that it changes daily, so Cuba cannot really depend on the Soviet Union for anything at this moment. There's an extreme shortage of fuel, wheat, rice, beans...everything that Cuba needs right now is in shortage.

So Cuba's in an extremely difficult situation, between a rock and a hard place. On one hand, Cuba is still suffering the effects of the u.s. blockade, economic embargo, etc. On the other hand, there's a kind of unofficial blockade by the Soviet Union and eastern european countries. Whether that's intentional or unintentional, the result is very real. The reality is that Cuba is, in effect, suffering a double blockade; suffering all kinds of political attacks by the united states—in the media, etc.—constantly. So now, more than any other time in Cuba's history, it's important to support Cuba. This is a crucial time economically, and because of the ideological changes that have swept the world, Cuba cannot be uninfluenced by this. So politically, it is a very sensitive time for Cuba. It's a time where Cuba is analyzing its history to rid itself of the mistakes inherited from europe and the Soviet Union and trying to outline its own path. This is a very difficult thing for an underdeveloped country to do, especially a country that is suffering the kind of blockade that Cuba is suffering.

protect women's rights, in terms of laws that protect children's rights, in terms of the family code that all men are supposed to adhere to when they get married, etc. However, there's a lot of machismo that exists in Cuban society. The family code exists, but many men just ignore it. The people who must be at the forefront of this struggle are women. You can't look at Cuba through the eyes of the united states. In the beginning of the revolution, i mean, it was a big struggle for the FMC, the Federation of Cuban Women, just to have women work outside of the home. They had to wage a tremendous struggle because the situation was one where many families could just not conceive of women doing anything but working inside of the home. They had to almost start from scratch. They couldn't talk about equality in the beginning between women and men, or women and men sharing the household chores. They had to first talk about men helping women because that was the only way in which it could be conceived. You cannot leap and step, just make drastic changes that the people don't understand 'cause the people are what it's about. So they had to go from one step to the next step, and now men are able to talk about sharing work. They're able to talk about total equality between men and women. But that was, and is, a process, one that *still* needs a whole lot of work. But, in terms of the government, and in terms of the revolution's commitment to the equality of women and women's participation, i think Fidel has demanded that the number of women in leadership reflect the population of women in the country—that women play an important role in all aspects of the society and in the leadership of the society. But again, that's a process. And again, it's still something that men struggle against and still try to frustrate.

M.M.: We want to hear a little about how the crisis in socialism has affected Cuba and some of the tasks for solidarity in terms of north amerikans and people in the u.s.

Assata: Intervention can take place, armed intervention, ideological...Intervention is a broad term. If you talk about intervention in terms of the role of the white left in the united states—if that's the context We're using...

M.M.: Yeah. Absolutely.

Assata: What people really have to think about is the work, and the content of that work. And if the content of the work is anti-racist, anti-arrogant, anti-imperialist, then i think that's the important part. i think the most important thing is to commit to an ideology and workstyle that's not arrogant and is anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-sexist, etc., etc., etc.

M.S.: Speaking of anti-sexist, we have a couple of questions relating to women. How were you empowered as a woman—a woman leader in the movement—and what things did you find empowering for yourself? What were some of your experiences with the Black Movement? And here in Cuba, how have you seen women involved in those movements?

Assata: Well, actually, to tell you the truth, i don't feel *em-pow-ered*. i feel that i'm a woman who struggles in a society that is sexist, in a movement that is sexist, and that is an ongoing struggle. i feel that any leadership role that i have played, or may play in the future, has to do with the work i do and the historical role i will play (do play, hopefully). i tend to believe leadership should depend on one's ability, one's work. Period. And that too often, people, men and women, are hung up on the leadership question. i think We should be more hung up on the work question. What

is the quality of my work?

But, i think in terms of the women question, women need to be struggled with, to be respected as equals, to be respected as human beings. Women need to struggle to eliminate any phase, *all* phases, of sexism in the movement and in the society as a whole. i don't think that you can eliminate sexism without eliminating, again, the roots of sexism; without building institutions that permit men and women to have non-sexist relationships. At this time, women are in a hell of a fix. The whole world is experiencing a crisis between men and women. The old way of relationships, the old division of work: men working in the field, women working in the home, is no longer valid. That is no longer real. Men and women have to find new ways to deal with each other that are not based on "me cookin' and you doin' whatever you do in the street." i mean, there's no economic basis for those old relationships. The reality of the modern world is that men and women both have to work in most societies because of economic necessity, because of the objective conditions. Therefore, there must be new relationships between men and women based on equality. And that's gonna be a struggle because men are not going to give up those privileges without a fight. And right now men are privileged. Women have to struggle to take away those privileges, and say, "i'm not gonna deal with oppression. i'm not going to deal with working two jobs, one in the home and one in the street. That's crazy."

The only human way that people can relate is as equals. That has an aesthetic, that has a beauty that no other kind of relationship can offer. The stereotypical, cartoon-type relationships people see repeatedly on television and at the movies and read about in books, that kind of stereotypical, narrow relationship is an impoverished relationship. The only way people can have rich relationships is to have relationships where exploitation is absent. And the only way exploitation is absent is when people say, "Well,

We'll change this."

Women have to be at the vanguard of that process, at the head of that process, because We are the most victimized. And men have to work, too! i mean, it's a two-way street. Sexism is something that people must work at. In terms of Afrikan-Amerikan women and men, Our situation is one of oppression—serious oppression. The only kind of sane relationships We can have are relationships of partners, partnerships in struggle. Any human relationship, any human relationship with any kind of beauty, has to involve changing the definition of what relationships are and change the reality of what We're dealing with in the context of the united states. So, We need to form a new aesthetic on how We relate to each other. We need to go to a new dimension in how We relate to each other out of necessity. Out of pure necessity. Because if We don't, We will be systematically wiped out. That's the reality. And the women question, the issue of the oppression of women, is key to the oppression of Our people as a whole. No kind of movement can be built with a sexist model, because that model is destructive to Us as a people, it's destructive in all senses. In Our movement, the issue of women is even more important. And the issue of struggling against sexism is even more important because We need a model of family, We need a model of relationships, of organizations, that is anti-sexist. We need that just on pure survival.

M.M.: Base those thoughts on Cuba regarding those questions, any models from Cuba?

Assata: i think Cuba has done a lot in terms of creating institutions that form the material base for sexism to be totally abolished. In terms of child-care centers, in terms of laws that